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Constructing State Power: Internal and External Frontiers in Colonial North India, 1850s-1900s

1. INTRODUCTION

British colonial authority in Sindh, a small province in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, confronted two important types of frontier between the 1850s and the turn of the twentieth century. Frontiers, in this context, are zones where state power is severely limited. I characterise the two types in Sindh as external and internal. External frontiers I take to be political boundaries, separating territory under one state's control from what lies beyond. This could be another organised state or non-centralised forms of social organisation – either way, the key characteristic of the frontier is that it denotes the limit of the state's claimed authority. The external frontier that I examine in this article was land near Sindh's northern border, which was also part of the north-western boundary of British India. Beyond it lay Balochistan, a mountainous region inhabited by Baloch tribes.¹ By internal frontiers I mean ecological-economic boundaries, beyond which a state's ability to manage people and landscapes is severely limited. Internal frontiers in nineteenth century Sindh were places where difficult terrain, poor communications, and a scarce population meant the state had a minimal presence, and little direct control.²

¹ This article follows the modern spellings of place names such as 'Sindh' and 'Balochistan', except in citations and direct quotations.

² This article's categories, external and internal frontiers, bear some similarities to Prescott's primary and secondary settlement frontiers, but departs from his assumption that settlement frontiers are necessarily

This article compares colonial policy on the external and internal frontiers, identifying changes and continuities in how officials used irrigation technology and population resettlement to enhance state authority there. I explain why the internal frontier eventually overtook the external frontier in colonial priorities. On each frontier the colonial authorities used similar methods to extend their control into previously ‘unstable’ areas. In particular, they dug irrigation canals and parcelled out agricultural land. But the specific drivers of the two frontier policies, the differing scope of environmental and demographic change, and the much greater level of control that officials envisaged on the internal frontier, meant that there were significant differences between the each type of frontier. The changing official discourses concerning frontiers in nineteenth century Sindh help us to identify developing ideas about populations, nature, and the morality of colonial rule.

The British Indian Empire’s north-western frontier, particularly the Pashtun regions of what is now north-western Pakistan, is best known to scholarship for the complexity of relations between the British and the tribes who lived there.³ An emerging scholarship on the region, though dynamic, has not so far addressed the relationship between frontier imperialism and natural environments. My study of frontiers in Sindh goes some way towards highlighting the importance of environmental change in understanding the region.⁴ Today Sindh is the southernmost province of Pakistan, where the River Indus meets the sea (see Fig 1). Conquered

colonized by self-motivated people. This article portrays a heavy official hand in frontier settlement. See JRV Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), ch. 2.

³ Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: A history of religious mobilisation in the Pakhtun Tribal Areas, 1890-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier, 1877-1947* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Magnus Marsden and Benjamin D Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (London: Hurst, 2011). Martin J Bayly, ‘The ‘Re-Turn’ To Empire in IR: Colonial Knowledge Communities and the Construction of the Idea of the Afghan Polity, 1809-38’, *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (2014): 443-464.

⁴ On the interaction between political, environmental and religious frontiers on the opposite side of the subcontinent, see Richard M Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1706* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1993), ch. 8-9.

by the British in 1843, it lay at the southern end of a belt of border provinces which also came to include Punjab (from 1849) and the North-West Frontier Province (from 1901). Sindh abutted the tribal lands of Balochistan and lay along the route from the sea to Afghanistan. Yet, as this article shows, officials in Sindh were far more concerned with the local implications of Sindh's frontier status: the possibility of tribal incursions in northern Sindh, on one hand, and on the other, the highly uneven distribution of state authority in south-eastern Sindh. One of the most important ways that the British addressed problems of frontier governance was by organizing the digging of canals from the Indus and settling the land that these irrigated. Canal policy afforded officials a chance to shape the relationship between people and state, using transformations of the social and agricultural landscapes to assert greater control. In colonial narratives, the expansion of irrigation in Sindh pacified an unruly population while domesticating a severe landscape.

The external and internal frontiers that this article discusses lay respectively on the border with tribal Balochistan and in south-eastern Sindh. The external frontier, Upper Sindh, was at the edge of British territory. There, the porousness of the border between the Upper Sindh Frontier District and Balochistan led officials to see canal construction as a way to transform the frontier into 'state space' (following Scott's terminology).⁵ Over the next fifty years, this external frontier gave way to the internal frontier in colonial priorities. The internal frontier featured in this article was located on the edge of the Thar Desert, comfortably within the territorial boundaries of British sovereignty but subject to significantly poorer state control than surrounding districts. Following the increasing regularisation of canal construction and colonization policy in the province overall, the administration constructed the Jamrao Canal in

⁵ James C Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 40.

this region during the 1890s and 1900s. Officials also drew up detailed plans for land use, demarcating field patterns, defining new village limits and closely controlling water distribution.

Comparing the two frontiers illustrates the process through which the colonial state territorialised its rule. It came increasingly to employ techniques of political control, through environmental transformation, that were framed in spatial terms. That framing changed over time. Early external frontier policy aimed to establish a colonial space in which settled agriculture could transform ‘wild’ Baloch tribesmen into peaceable cultivators. This established a distinctive social and moral landscape that contrasted with non-British domains across the border. It meant making good on the colonial government’s claim to sovereignty over Sindh’s territory. Later on, internal frontier policy also pushed state authority into regions where it had been weak before. The intention this time was not to define the character of empire’s territorial ‘inside’, but to create a modern landscape combining technically efficient irrigation, profitable agriculture, and a politically stable rural society. Before addressing the case studies, however, the next section discusses the value and limitations of frontiers as a category of analysis in the case of Sindh.

2. FRONTIERS IN THEORY

The concept of internal and external frontiers in South Asian history is not new, but the majority of existing literature applies to the early modern periods, or the earlier days of East India Company rule. Scholarship on the Mughal Empire (1526-c.1818), Britain’s imperial predecessor in the subcontinent, has demonstrated that state control in South Asia had long historical geographies of limitation. Heesterman has argued that the power of the Mughal state depended on control of urban centres, which financed and processed agricultural outputs from surrounding hinterlands. Mughal oversight concentrated on such towns, and the trade routes

connecting them. Imperial officials and tributary local rulers (often indistinguishable in practice) extracted agricultural surpluses where they could, and some of this made its way to the imperial court as revenue. Where imperial officers could not extend their authority, through a lack of soldiers or road access, local leaders frequently refused to pay tribute. Such spaces, rather than the outer borders around the Mughals' proclaimed domains, constituted what Heesterman called 'The real frontier [...] a ragged and shifting internal one'.⁶ The distinction between imperial control and its absence characterises the internal frontier in Heesterman's analysis, something that this article broadly supports.

Gommans interprets medieval and early modern South Asian 'inner frontiers' more decisively as ecological phenomena. In his analysis, inner frontier were the interface between settled agrarian societies in humid or artificially irrigated tracts and pastoral nomads in drier zones. Such interfaces, he argues, provided the ideal location for state capitals between 1200 and 1800 because regimes increasingly drew on both the agricultural produce of settled peasants and the horses, camels and dromedaries that pastoralists bred, as well as the mercenary services of pastoralists themselves.⁷ This article demonstrates that the later British colonial state, too, articulated and made use of distinctions between settled and pastoral zones. Rather than preserve Gommans's inner frontier as a strategic resource, however, I argue that frontier policy during the second half of the nineteenth century was geared towards replacing mobile populations with settled agriculturalists, wherever the government perceived a pressing need to do so.

In colonial Sindh the twinned processes of transforming environments and extending

⁶ JC Heesterman, 'Western Expansion, Indian Reaction: Mughal Empire and British Raj', in *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian ritual, kingship, and society* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), esp. 170.

⁷ Jos Gommans, 'The Silent Frontier of South Asia, c. AD 1100-1800', *Journal of World History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 1-23. See also Jos Gommans, 'Warhorse and post-nomadic empire in Asia, c.1000-1800', *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 1 (March 2007), 1-21.

state power were top-down, official-driven plans to change land-use patterns, redistribute populations, and introduce market economics. My case studies differ from classic examples of frontier settlement in which states relied on a mass of settlers to take the initiative in pushing into ‘new’ lands beyond what the state claimed as its own, and turn them into tax revenue-producing farmlands.⁸ As I will argue, both external and internal frontier policy in Sindh had both ecological-economic and political aspects, aiming to produce social and agricultural landscapes that emplaced colonial order. The two case studies were differentiated by the type and scope of colonial order that officials worked towards, something that was heavily influenced by Upper Sindh’s location at the edge of British territory, and south-eastern Sindh’s position well within it. The spatial orientation of the two frontiers, external and internal, is the key to understanding this difference, and therefore the colonial administration’s changing relationship to people and space.

Space, and contrasting moral valuations of it, can indeed be at the heart of frontier thinking. As an imperial power, the colonial government in British India was not bound by considerations of ethnic, linguistic or religious (still less ‘national’) limits to its authority. British power came to rest, geographically speaking, at a line beyond which the colonial authorities could not or would not push. Because Sindh lay at the edge of British India, the western part of its provincial boundary was also the imperial boundary. The tribes of Balochistan lay beyond. In principle, the colonial government claimed sovereignty over the whole of Sindh. Having sovereignty in one place but not in another, contiguous place is important. As Walker has argued,

⁸ Populations in North America thrust westwards during the 18th and 19th centuries. Russian peasants expanded into the Tatar lands of the semi-forested steppe south-east of Moscow between the 16th and 18th centuries, with a defensive military line gradually following behind them. On the US, see John C Hudson, ‘North American Origins of Middlewestern Frontier Populations’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 78, no. 3 (September 1988), 395-413. On Russia, see John F Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An environmental history of the early modern world* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2003), 255-267.

distinguishing a state's territorial 'outside' is essential to creating a political order within its 'inside'.⁹ Yet in practice, as this article will show, Sindh's boundaries did not represent a hard spatial edge to British power. Instead, the regions abutting the border were zones of lesser state control. I follow political geography literature in terming such zones frontiers, in contrast with borders or boundaries which evoke a precise division of territory between two states.¹⁰ I also follow environmental historians who have used the concept of frontiers to mean places where colonizing states and societies come up against hostile, unfamiliar terrain, often already occupied by indigenous people.¹¹ Porousness (that is, openness to tribesmen's unauthorized mobility) characterised Sindh's external frontier, as did a sparse population, dearth of cultivated land, and intense heat. As this article demonstrates, colonial frontier policy there aimed to reduce mobility while increasing agricultural production. These aims were, however, modest. This is not a story of turning a 'soft' frontier into a 'hard' border, but of creating a more settled space within British Sindh that contrasted with the 'wildness' (as the British perceived it) of Balochistan. In other words, I will demonstrate how the British intended to change the character of the Upper Sindh Frontier as a zone. They focussed on addressing on the social and natural environment within nominal colonial territory, rather than asserting state power at the border itself.

My understanding of the colonial state's endeavours to produce particular geographies of

⁹ RBJ Walker, *Inside/Outside: International relations as political theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries*, 36. Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1989), 4-5

¹¹ Richards, *The Unending Frontier*. William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Michael A. Redclift, *Frontiers: Histories of civil society and nature* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2006). David A. Bello, 'To Go Where No Han Could Go For Long: Malaria and the Qing construction of ethnic administrative space in frontier Yunnan', *Modern China* 31, no. 3 (2005): 283-317. Gregg Mitman, 'In Search of Health: Landscape and disease in American environmental history', *Environmental History* 10 (April 2005): 184-210.

power draws on Scott's recent analysis of the relationship in Southeast Asia between socially stratified agrarian states based in valleys and egalitarian, tribally-organised people living in mountainous regions nearby. He terms the latter 'state-evaders'. Scott helpfully distinguishes between the valleys as 'state space' and the mountains as 'non-state space'.¹² He argues that valley states projected a moral divide between state space as 'civilised' and non-state space as its 'uncivilised' other. Scott's examples present striking similarities to British India, where colonial control was strong on the central plains but tenuous in the mountains to the north-west and north-east.¹³ Gilmartin shows that British colonial rule's claim to legitimacy in the Indus Basin also rested on drawing a moral divide between settled agriculture on the plains and nomadism in the hills.¹⁴

Scott also presents the flipside of this civilizational worldview, arguing that for hill people themselves, evading state structures was a positive reason to live at altitude. He points to the flexible and shifting names, group identifications, and origin stories of hill people as designed to resist being understood by outsiders. The complexity of Baloch tribal organisation in the lands beyond Sindh, with multiple branches, shifting claims to lineage, and openness to groups moving in and out of particular tribes, suggests that the hill Baloch might have taken a similar approach.¹⁵ Understanding how Baloch conceptualised their relationship to Sindh, to

¹² Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 99-125.

¹³ On the northeast, see Markus Franke, *War and Nationalism in South Asia: The Indian state and the Nagas* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2009). Scott notes that other types of difficult terrain, such as swamps and forests, can also prevent the effective extension of state space. For an analysis of indigenous resistance to colonial forest policy in India, see Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An ecological history of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), ch. 5.

¹⁴ David Gilmartin, *Blood and Water: Environment, community and empire in the Indus Basin* (University of California Press, forthcoming 2015), ch. 2 [p.39 of manuscript].

¹⁵ On Baloch social structure in the nineteenth century, see M Longworth Dames, *The Baloch Race: A historical and ethnological sketch* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1904). Denys Bray (ed.), *Ethnographic Survey of Balochistan* (Bombay: Times Press, 1913).

settled agriculture, and to the colonial state would certainly enrich our understanding of the external frontier. But histories of Balochistan, and sources putting forward tribal points of view, are scarce.¹⁶ This article therefore tells only the imperialists' side of the story.

The existence of frontiers as zones of reduced state control helps to advance on Scott's more straightforward conceptualisation of a binary distinction between 'state' and 'non-state' space. This was true of the external frontier, as an interstice between British and Baloch territory that displayed characteristics of both. It was also true of Sindh's internal frontiers, where the challenges to colonial authority were environmental and economic rather than political. This is not wholly surprising: historiography of frontiers in other imperial contexts has convincingly shown human impact on the environment, and vice versa, to be a key part of frontier conquest.¹⁷ In South Asia, several scholars have shown that transformations of nature and landscapes in colonial north India were fundamental to the extension of state power during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Canal irrigation is particularly pertinent in the case of India's semi-arid north and northwest.¹⁸ What differentiates my study from more classical environmental

¹⁶ For comparable difficulties relating to the Pashtun areas of modern north-western Pakistan, see Elisabeth Leake, 'The Politics of the North-West Frontier of the Indian Subcontinent, 1936-65' (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Cambridge, 2013), 21-22.

¹⁷ The foundational text of American frontier studies was Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' (1893), in *The Significance of the Frontier in American History and Other Essays/ With Commentary by John Mack Faragher* (New York: H. Holt, 1994). Turner's venerable thesis remains important in American environmental history today: see TRC Hutton, 'Beating a Dead Horse?: The continuing presence of Frederick Jackson Turner in environmental and Western history', *International Social Science Review* 77, no. 1/2 (2002): 47-57. For other examples, see Richards, *The Unending Frontier*, 4-6, 112-147, 242-273, 334-376. Alan Lester, 'Settlers, the State and Colonial Power: The colonization of Queen Adelaide Province, 1834-37', *The Journal of African History* 39:2 (1998). Caroline A Williams, *Between Resistance and Adaptation: Indigenous peoples and the colonisation of the Chocó, 1510-1753* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004). William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (ed.s), *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western past* (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1992). Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert and David Schecter, 'The Environmental Dynamics of a Colonial Fuel-Rush: Silver mining and deforestation in New Spain, 1522 to 1810', *Environmental History* 15 (January 2010): 94-119.

¹⁸ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 113-140. David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, landscape, and science, 1800-1856* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005). David Gilmartin, 'Scientific Empire and Imperial

histories is an explicit engagement with space, as well as people and natural environments, as an object of transformation. My discussion of British canal-colony development in south-eastern Sindh demonstrates an official concern with creating what Walker terms the ‘flat territorialities of states’ in which all the space within a state’s boundaries is equally subject to state authority.¹⁹ Again, British officials did not necessarily expect to create a genuinely ‘flat’ state space. Indeed, as I will argue, colonial planners used the conceptual (if not actual demographic) emptiness of the internal frontier to create a zone of greater-than-average state power, where a more precisely-managed water delivery system combined with a more strictly-managed agricultural settlement policy. The internal and external frontiers both therefore represented zones of differentiation, conceptually and practically different from the bulk of the province. Frontiers, in other words, demonstrate that not all state spaces are created, or remain, equal.

3. BALOCH TRIBES AND SINDH’S EXTERNAL FRONTIER

Canal-building during the 1860s represented a self-conscious British attempt to transform the unstable region of northern Sindh and consolidate colonial control on the external frontier. Sindh’s north-west was subject to frequent raids by tribesmen crossing the border from Balochistan. British officials responded by turning the area into a site for the joint remaking of Sindh’s landscape and Baloch tribal society. This section specifically reflects on correspondence between two British officers about how to deal with a troublesome group of border tribesmen known as the Masuris. The officers’ solution was not punitive violence, but to encourage the Masuris to dig canals and settle in Sindh. This demonstrated the flexibility of the imperial system in India, which used irrigated agriculture to incorporate, or at least pacify, ‘unruly natives’.

Science: Colonialism and irrigation technology in the Indus Basin’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 4 (1994): 1127-1149.

¹⁹ Walker, *Inside/outside*, 131.

Officials expected canal-digging, and settling Baloch tribes on the land canals irrigated, to pacify the tribes and bring the Sindh-Balochistan borderlands under surer control. Transforming the region, known as Upper Sindh, created an ‘inside’ to colonial space. Settled, peaceable agriculture characterised this space, which contrasted sharply with the presumed violence and unrestrained mobility of the ‘outside’, the Baloch tribal regions. Travelling north-west from the Sindh’s administration’s base in Karachi, the external frontier came to represent the last outpost of colonial space.

The transformative potential of canal-based agriculture was by no means unique to the frontier. Digging canals, irrigating farmland, and extracting revenue from cultivators were standard British practices in north India, and benefitted the colonial government politically and economically. In Punjab, especially, colonial engineers’ control of canal water from the 1840s onwards helped the British to build alliances with peasants and landlords alike.²⁰ These relationships persisted until the British withdrawal from India in 1947. British engineers’ water projects across India amounted to what D’Souza has termed ‘colonial hydrology’, which favoured large-scale technological interventions to mark state power and produce profit.²¹

Yet canal construction in Upper Sindh was distinctive because its geographical contiguity with ‘wild’ Balochistan put it in close proximity to space over which the colonial state neither had nor claimed any authority. In the decades after the British general, Sir Charles Napier, conquered Sindh’s rulers, the Talpur Mirs, in 1843, the new province’s border with Balochistan remained unstable. Stretching 150 miles from Kashmore to the northern spurs of the Hala

²⁰ Imran Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). M Mufakharul Islam, *Irrigation, Agriculture and the Raj: Punjab, 1887-1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997). Daniel R Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology transfer in the age of imperialism, 1850-1940* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²¹ Rohan D’Souza, ‘Water in British India: The making of a ‘colonial hydrology’’, *History Compass* 4, no. 4 (2006): 621-628.

Mountains, this was a region where the colonial administration relied on military force to prevent Baloch tribesmen from crossing into British territory and attacking colonial subjects. The open, flat nature of the land helped colonial authorities to deploy force effectively. So did population distribution. Villages in the neighbouring British-controlled province of Punjab nestled close to the Balochistan border and presented nearby targets to incoming tribesmen, but imperial cavalry could patrol more effectively in sparsely-populated northern Sindh.²² Targeted violence made the reputations of legendary British officials. The most famous example in Sindh was John Jacob, who established forts and led punitive cross-border raids across against the tribes. Better-known still was Robert Sandeman in southern Punjab.²³ Irrigation extension on the Upper Sindh frontier was therefore only one aspect of colonial efforts to impose order. Coercion was equally important.

The British, on annexing Sindh, had claimed sovereignty over the plains. The surrounding hills to the west and north were the domain of Baloch tribesmen. But this was mainly a geographical distinction, and there was no sure way to differentiate ‘Baloch’ from some ‘Sindhi’ people. Thirteenth-century writers reported the presence of Baloch in north-western Sindh, and tribes sporadically raided in Sindh thereafter.²⁴ According to one early twentieth-century ethnography, the ‘native’ application of the term Balochistan included the Jacobabad and Shikarpur districts of Upper Sindh, as well as parts of Punjab and Persia in which ethnic Baloch lived. The author estimated that people identifiable as ‘Baloch’ comprised nearly one-quarter of

²² Thomas Henry Thornton, *Colonel Sir Robert Sandeman: His life and work on our Indian frontier* (London: John Murray, 1895), 15-17.

²³ On Jacob, see Hugh Trevor Lambrick, *John Jacob of Jacobabad* [1960] (Karachi; London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 113-115, 147-172. On Sandeman, see Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and tribal administration on the North-West Frontier, 1877-1947* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Marsden and Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*.

²⁴ Dames, *The Baloch Race*, 33, 40, 50, 53.

Sindh's population at that time. They retained tribal genealogies but were 'more or less assimilated' into the Sindhi population, suggesting that a clear territorial division between the Sindhi and Baloch areas did not exist.²⁵ The Talpurs themselves had been Baloch immigrants, originally retainers of the previous, native Sindhi Kalhora rulers whom they displaced in 1783.

The relationship between the people and places of Sindh and Balochistan was therefore complex and dynamic. British colonial officials could hardly distinguish clearly between Sindhis as British subjects and Baloch as foreign. Instead, colonial understanding of the Upper Sindh frontier revolved around thinking of people living in British territory as civilisable. Officials assumed that 'wild' Baloch tribesmen, by digging canals and settling the land canals irrigated, could become civilised. They would simultaneously transform themselves and the physical environment of their new home. Marsden and Hopkins have shown how this conceptualisation of people and places at the edge of imperial territory developed into what they term 'frontier governmentality' in Balochistan during the 1870s-1890s. Elsewhere, colonial governance in the 'settled' parts of the Indian interior attempted to fix Indians into ethnographic categories which objectified social groups and rendered them malleable for policymakers. By contrast, Marsden and Hopkins argue, British frontier policy depended on excluding tribesmen from colonial space and therefore from the modernizing aspect of imperial rule.²⁶ This offers a context-specific way to frame Scott's idea of state and non-state spaces. The superior civilisation of settled agriculturalists was, from a colonial point of view, a beneficial product of being under British rule. The moral divide between colonial and tribal space was central to the supposed legitimacy of British rule.²⁷ In this context, British actions in Upper Sindh's borderlands attempted to bring

²⁵ Dames, *The Baloch Race*, 1.

²⁶ Marsden and Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*, 64-102.

²⁷ David Gilmartin, *Blood and Water*, ch. 2 [p.39 of manuscript].

Baloch tribes into an area where irrigation policy could act on them: to remove them from tribal space into colonial space, and render them malleable. By this means the colonial authorities established Upper Sindh as a state space, in contrast with the presumed characteristics of empire's 'outside', mountainous Balochistan.

British assumptions about the characteristics of plains space and hill space, the inside and outside of empire, appeared strikingly in the government's policy towards the Masuri tribe, a branch of the Baloch Bugtis, during the 1860s. The Masuris had long troubled settled agriculturalists in British territory with violent attacks. In 1864, the Masuri chief approached the Political Agent in Balochistan, Major Malcom Green, to ask for a grant of land in an uncultivated tract of Sindh's Sairwah Canal. Green wrote that the Masuris were 'amongst the boldest plunderers [of cattle and property] along the Frontier', but were probably driven to their lifestyle by poverty. The example of other Baloch tribes in the area, he thought, had shown the Masuris the kind of benefits that could accrue from settling down to agriculture under British supervision.²⁸ Green recommended that the Sindh government grant the Masuris' request. This followed established local precedent. John Jacob, a pioneering British officer of the region, had previously addressed the problem of Baloch incursions into the thinly populated, scrub-covered frontier region of Upper Sindh during the late 1840s and early 1850s. Jacob had given unused, government-owned land to Baloch tribes, who cleared the scrub and dug canals. Tribesmen, Jacob reasoned, were the one group who would not fear attacks from other Baloch pastoralists.²⁹

²⁸ Major Malcolm Green, Political Agent in Beloochistan [*sic*], to Lieutenant-Colonel HNR Green, Political Superintendent and Commandant on the Frontier Upper Sind [*sic*], 14 January 1864. Maharashtra State Archives (MSA), Government of Bombay (GoB) Revenue Department (RD) vol. 26 of 1865, compilation 422. Sources do not specify the leader's name, but the memoir of a Punjab officer refers to dead raiders in Dera Ghazi Khan district of southern Punjab in 1866 as 'Mussoorie Bugtis' belonging to Gholam Hossein's band. Gholam Hossein might be the leader in question. Richard Isaac Bruce, *The Forward Policy and Its Results; or, thirty-five years' work amongst the tribes on our North-West Frontier of India* (London: Longmans & Co, 1900), 19.

²⁹ Lambrick, *John Jacob*, 239-240.

Allocating canal land in Upper Sindh was, by the time of the Masuri tribe's request, a well-established method of neutralising threats to colonial authority by bringing Baloch tribesmen into the state's territorial, and therefore administrative and moral, domain. In other words, Jacob had begun the production of colonial space on the external frontier.

Since colonial authorities had plenty of land at their disposal, and the Baloch themselves dug canals before settling it, the frontier settlement policy was pragmatic. But officials' understandings of the relationship between Baloch people and the natural environment lent ideological reinforcement to the practice. Major Green's correspondence on the Masuris highlighted the power of landscapes to provoke good or bad relations between tribes and the colonial state. He presented a deterministic picture in which the Baloch would respond inevitably to improved environmental conditions. He suggested to a fellow officer on the Upper Sindh frontier that 'full benefit would be derived by Government, [if] the settlement of the Tribe within our borders [...] remove[d] an important [source] of restlessness and discord from the hills'.³⁰ The letter's recipient was the Political Superintendent and Commandant on the Upper Sindh Frontier, Lieutenant-Colonel HNR Green (the shared surname seems to be coincidental). He in turn commended the Major's recommendations to Sindh's chief administrator, the Commissioner-in-Sindh. Lieutenant-Colonel Green of the Upper Sindh frontier used similar language to that of his junior officer: 'I feel confident', he wrote, that 'if certain tracts of land were reserved near [the canal] for any [Baloch] mountaineers, who wished to settle within British Territory[,] that the plundering tribes of whose depredations we occasionally hear so much of [*sic*] would gradually become peaceable cultivators'.³¹ The Greens' correspondence

³⁰ Major Malcolm Green to Lieutenant-Colonel HNR Green, 14 January 1864.

³¹ Lieutenant-Colonel HNR Green, Political Superintendent and Commandant on the Frontier Upper Sind, to J Mansfield, Commissioner-in-Sindh, 25 January 1864. MSA, GoB RD vol. 26 of 1865, compilation 422.

contrasted the apparent poverty of pastoralism in the Balochistan hill tracts with the material benefits of agrarian life. As the Major Green, the Political Agent in Balochistan, would have it, the ‘comparative luxury’ that tribes already under British protection in Sindh enjoyed characterised the colonial space of British Sindh. By contrast, an ‘exciting but precarious mode of life’ based on plunder characterised the space outside.³²

In fact, the relationship between rugged terrain, tribal society, and cross-border violence was more complex. Missing from Major Green’s analysis was the unstable political condition of Kalat, the region of Balochistan next to Upper Sindh –surprisingly, since he represented the imperial government there. During an ongoing civil war against his subordinate tribal chiefs, the Khan of Kalat had dug into his fort and relinquished any hope of disciplining the tribes of the northern hills.³³ A complex reality is also the implication of one historian’s assertion that a common reason for cross-border raiding was blood feuds between tribes inside and outside British territory, rather than straightforward robbery.³⁴ Nevertheless, Major Green reduced the problem to a simplified sequence in which a poor environment in the tribal area led to poverty, which in turn led to raiding in British Sindh. Consequently, in the proposal to settle Masuris on the Sairwah Canal tract, the agricultural plains appeared to colonial officials as a space in which landscape, irrigation technology, and colonial authority could combine to remake tribal society. The case of the Masuris demonstrates one way in which officials attempted to bring ‘uncivilised’ tribes into the colonial fold. Sindh’s external frontier became a site for re-making tribal society.

Yet the Greens’ correspondence pointed to the contradiction of the colonial state attempting to ‘fix’ the highly mobile Masuris onto the land and into settled agricultural lifestyles,

³² Major Malcolm Green to Lieutenant-Colonel HNR Green, 14 January 1864.

³³ See Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, 53.

³⁴ Lambrick, *John Jacob*, 111.

while having very limited powers to compel obedience from them. The Greens' argument for canal development in Upper Sindh aimed to regularise state control over people and space in the region at the same time as it demonstrated the fragile nature of state power on the frontier. Turning the frontier into colonial space, and consolidating control there, required the tribes' voluntary cooperation. A later Commissioner-in-Sindh, Evan James, reiterated that canal development had given the administration an alternative to coercion in managing tribal behaviour. Of the three frontier canals that the British extended or constructed between the 1850s and the 1880s, James wrote, the Deputy Commissioner for the Upper Sindh frontier had distributed the lands himself. Here lands were granted *gratis* to Baloch Sirdars and tribes, 'the object being to reclaim them from rapine and plunder and induce them to take to peaceful pursuits.'³⁵ In fact many British land grants to subgroups of the Bugti tribe from the hills during the 1870s were intended to enhance the power of particular pastoral headmen who remained in Balochistan, rather than merely to encourage the Baloch to abandon pastoralism in favour of settlement.³⁶ The main intended effect of grants of Sindhi land sometimes took place in Balochistan, not in Sindh itself. But the repeated assertion of Sindh officers that canal land near the Baloch border had value in removing the sting from raids into British territory suggested that this was an important concern, at least of the provincial administration. Indeed the 1907 provincial *Gazetteer* demonstrated the longevity of James' vision of land distribution on these canals; it claimed that the Desert Canal in particular had 'helped to wean the frontier tribes from inveterate habits of lawlessness'.³⁷ This frontier, then, was a site for incorporating Baloch tribes

³⁵ Evan James, Commissioner-in-Sindh, to Secretary to GoB RD, 08 October 1896. MSA, GoB RD vol. 147 of 1897, compilation 1486.

³⁶ Gilmartin, *Blood and Water*, ch. 2 [p.42-43 of manuscript].

³⁷ Edward Hamilton Aitken, *Gazetteer of the Province of Sind* (Karachi: 'Mercantile' Steam Press for the Government [of Bombay?], 1907), 265-269.

into the colonial order by turning them from nomadic state-evaders into settled cultivators and peaceable subjects.

Governance and settled agriculture therefore went hand in hand on the Upper Sindh frontier during the 1840s and 1850s. Canals were instrumental in this approach. Officials seemed to be concerned with the frontier primarily as a zone where the state struggled to act, especially in law and order terms. Officials believed settling tribesmen on canal land would make the frontier easier to govern. Their prime concern was not nature, space, and agriculture so much as the effect that transforming nature through canal colonisation would have. Indeed the district was a frontier by virtue of what lay just outside, and those who could not readily be prevented from coming inside: Baloch raiders. In this sense British thinking about the Upper Sindh frontier was necessarily oriented outwards, towards the other side of the border. Instrumentally, canals, sedentary agriculture, and intensified land-use were a means to the desired end of peace between Sindh and the tribes. Conceptually, they transformed an ungovernable wild space, empire's 'outside', into a more orderly inside.

4. CANALS AND MODERNISATION ON AN INTERNAL FRONTIER

Irrigation was also the key technology that officials used to address the problem of insufficient state control over internal frontiers – the 'wild' spaces of interior Sindh. Even well inside Sindh's provincial boundaries, where there were no border-crossing tribes to challenge colonial authority, a scarce population and limited communications meant that the administration had little presence. Unlike the process of marking off colonial plains space from tribal hill space, which had characterised British policy in Upper Sindh, the administration's approach to south-eastern Sindh aimed to extend state power more evenly over the area irrigated by one particular canal, the Jamrao canal, during the 1890s-1900s. The Jamrao tract, beginning north-east of the

southern town Hyderabad and stretching towards the Thar Desert on Sindh's eastern fringes, was mostly uncultivated scrubland. With little tax-yielding agriculture there, and no major canals, neither revenue officials nor engineers frequented the area. Canal technology, as on the external frontier of Upper Sindh, could help establish the state's writ. But the narrow political remit of Upper Sindh canal construction gave way to a more ambitious assault on the perceived characteristics of south-eastern Sindh: arid, socially backward, and poor. Officials approached this objective in two ways: first, by introducing new irrigation technologies that facilitated and embedded official control over agriculture in a way that was unprecedented in Sindh; and second, by promoting the immigration of particular groups into the canal tract, in order to create a new social geography of agricultural productivity and loyalty to the colonial regime.

The shift in British attention from the external frontier with Balochistan to internal frontiers like the Jamrao tract was the culmination of changes in colonial agricultural policy in Sindh, which two major developments made possible. First, the British officer Robert Sandeman instituted a new system of political relations with the tribes of Balochistan, which greatly reduced the threat of cross-border raiding into both Sindh and Punjab. As Deputy Commissioner of Dera Ghazi Khan District in Punjab between 1866 and 1876, Sandeman proactively intercepted Baloch raiding parties on British territory. From 1877, as Agent to the Governor General in Balochistan, he worked effectively to stabilise relations between the Khan of Kalat and his tribes. Following the decrease in raiding, civilian administrators replaced military officers as the administrators of the Upper Sindh Frontier District in 1881.³⁸ Second, infrastructure development in Sindh continued apace. As the 1890s commenced, several important new irrigation schemes were in progress in northern, southern and eastern Sindh.

³⁸ On Sandeman, see Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, 57-61; Marsden and Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*, ch.2.

Extensions to Sindh's rail network during the 1880s and 1890s also helped to open up the province commercially.³⁹ Both of these developments helped the government to improve its revenue base in the province, and move beyond simply maintaining its political position by finding collaborators and suppressing revolt.

Under these changing conditions, the Sindh administration increasingly prioritised the commercialisation of agriculture within the province. Like provincial governments across India, it constructed canals for profit. In Sindh, unlike elsewhere in India, there was no special charge for water: cultivators paid for water that they received from government canals by paying higher tax rates on the crops they grew. Building or improving canals was an important way of pushing up revenue receipts, and reforms to the land revenue system accompanied canal-digging. Beginning in 1887, an 'Irrigational Settlement' was introduced piecemeal into Sindh, which determined land revenue according to the type of irrigation practised upon it.⁴⁰ The Jamrao Canal, constructed between 1898 and 1900, was designed to make a profit, and once it came into operation the provincial administration was pleased to learn that the canal was projected to have raised enough money to cover its costs and begin making profits by the relatively early date of 1931.⁴¹ Canal development in the province also had political and environmental implications. The Jamrao Canal was designed irrigate more than 900,000 acres of land, with engineers able to control water distribution much more closely than on any other part of Sindh's irrigation network. Also unlike any other canal in Sindh at the time, it provided water to raise two crops

³⁹ On railways, see Sarah Ansari, *Life After Partition: Migration, community and strife in Sindh, 1947-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24-25.

⁴⁰ The administration distinguished between 'lift' irrigation, which relied on raising water in buckets from a low-lying watercourse to higher land, and 'flow' irrigation, in which water flowed down onto land beneath a channel. Aitken, *Gazetteer*, 406-407.

⁴¹ 'Statement of Financial Anticipations', 17 March 1903, in Government of Bombay, Public Works Department, *Report on the Jamrao Canal Project, Sind* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1907), 6.

per year on each patch of land, rather than only one, making land more valuable. It was the widest-ranging and most visible example of British attempts to strengthen the colonial state's control over people and space, pushing back the internal frontier in the process.

The Jamrao Canal demonstrated the degree to which British officials were re-envisioning Sindh as an arena for modernist development. The Jamrao project was the first large-scale, systematic attempt to construct a new, avowedly modern type of agrarian society in the province's interior. Administrators were no longer concerned with using canal irrigation to demarcate empire's inside from its outside. Instead, the process of constructing and colonizing the Jamrao Canal revealed an equal concern with imposing order on space. Settled agricultural regions represented zones of colonial control, while non-irrigated land represented a chaotic 'state of nature'. Disciplining the landscape, even in empire's interiors, was therefore a first order of business.

Physical conditions were certainly adverse, and official accounts of the Jamrao project emphasised the wildness of the places the canal occupied. The construction work was tough, and several engineers who were assigned to the project 'broke down' after a few months in the desolate, sweltering landscape.⁴² Both engineers and workmen suffered from cholera and malaria; one engineer wrote that 'at first the country was a dismal desert where no provisions nor even drinking water at some places could be got'.⁴³ In these respects, the Jamrao project was similar to the contemporary canal construction projects of western Punjab. The Punjab canal colonies were a platform for demonstrating the value of European science, technology, and

⁴² GoB Public Works Department (PWD) Resolution W.I.-1399, 10 June 1902, pr.1. MSA, GoB RD vol. 150 of 1902, compilation 1486.

⁴³ Executive Engineer, Jamrao Canal Southern District, to Superintending Engineer, Indus Left Bank Division, 09 April 1902, quoted in PWD Resolution WI-1399, 10 June 1902.

human endeavour.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Jamrao tract's very wildness made it an ideal object of transformation. The new kind of agriculture that officials wished to introduce was premised on the notion of scientific water control. As Weil has argued, the second half of the nineteenth century marked the ascendancy in the Indus Basin (and elsewhere in India) of water control policy designed to address engineering, rather than political, considerations.⁴⁵

Increased technical control over water flows enabled greater disciplining of space. Specifically, the system of water control envisaged by the Jamrao Canal's designers had implications for land usage. Irrigation provision on the Upper Sindh frontier had resulted from a desire to demarcate a zone of colonial control, morally coded as 'good' and controllable, in contrast with the 'bad' and uncontrollable tribal hill region beyond it. By contrast, the layout of watercourses and villages on the Jamrao tract was geared towards enabling greater state control over cultivation and thereby producing a modern landscape. Accordingly, the technique of planning and constructing agricultural spaces in south-eastern Sindh did not rely on mobilising Baloch labour to dig canals which they themselves then settled. Instead, the Jamrao project was an arena for careful top-down planning.

Unlike most villages in Sindh, village boundaries along the Jamrao tract were demarcated before the canal was completed, and before settlement occurred. The tract was, in principle, divided into a nested hierarchy of 2,000-acre villages, 16-acre squares, and one-acre sub-squares. The water-distribution system was equally rigid. Larger channels carried water from the main canal, with channels of successively decreasing size branching off to serve particular areas of

⁴⁴ David Gilmartin, 'Migration and Modernity: The state, the Punjabi village, and the settling of the canal colonies', in Ian Talbot and Shinder Thandi (eds), *People on the Move: Punjabi colonial and post-colonial migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3-5.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Weil, 'The Rivers Come: Colonial flood control and knowledge systems in the Indus Basin, 1840s-1930s', *Environment and History* 12 (2006), 3-29.

land. Villages were supposedly limited to 2,000 acres in area, and watercourses to three miles in length, to optimize the efficiency with which water could be distributed.⁴⁶ Mr Dunn, the Superintending Engineer in charge of the Jamrao Canal, celebrated the degree of control that the organisation of water management in the Jamrao tract gave to irrigation officials.⁴⁷

Reality in the tract did not quite live up to the plan. While officials intended technical principles to govern village layouts and the use of water, the logistics of maintaining close control often defeated the administration. Village acreage and watercourse lengths frequently exceeded the stipulated limits, and cultivators were lax about building the barriers necessary to divide up the 16-acre squares. Some officials, too, expressed reservations about trying to assert too much control over the tract's agricultural spaces. For example, both the Commissioner-in-Sindh and the Bombay government's Revenue Secretary were uncomfortable with suggestions that the administration should formally prohibit rice growing, which would use more water per field than the canal was designed to supply.⁴⁸ Yet these villages and the accompanying water-distribution system were far more ordered and regular than those found elsewhere in Sindh. As Mitchell has argued of village reconstruction in nineteenth-century Egypt, colonial building projects aimed at order. They replaced crowded, haphazard native villages with new, pre-planned, regular villages.⁴⁹ In a similar vein, laying out villages on the Jamrao tract gave officials an opportunity to match a closely controlled canal with more intensive management of people

⁴⁶ For details on village layout and water distribution on the Jamrao tract, see Government of Bombay, Public Works Department, *Report on the Jamrao Canal Project, Sind* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1907), 3, 71-73.

⁴⁷ Note by Superintending Engineer Indus Left Bank Division, 17 July 1901. British Library, London (henceforth BL), RD (Lands) (July-December 1901), IOR/P/6239, p.2411.

⁴⁸ See Secretary to Government of Bombay, to Secretary to Government of India, Revenue and Agricultural Department, 26 September 1898. Government of Sindh Archives, Karachi (henceforth GSA), GoB RD 69A of 1899, vol. I.

⁴⁹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 44-45.

and agricultural space.

The possibility of doing so depended on the relative ‘emptiness’ of the region. Colonial discourse in Punjab drew sharp distinctions between types of land. One type had a clear owner, and was actively farmed. Village commons, or ‘wasteland’, was another.⁵⁰ In Sindh, where landowners frequently owned vast tracts but cultivated only small portions of it, the administration recognised a wider range of landowners’ proprietary claims to land which had long lain fallow than in Punjab.⁵¹ Yet where such claims did not exist, land was open to fresh colonisation and development. Population scarcity in the tract therefore became an opportunity rather than a concern, since it meant that there was plenty of land that the state could claim, and use to settle carefully-chosen immigrant cultivators. The very emptiness of the tract made it a suitably blank slate on which the administration could project a new kind of agrarian society. The Jamrao tract, then, changed from a wild space to a site of greater state control. The ‘dismal desert’ in Sindh was becoming the site of a more sophisticated architecture of governance, which encompassed both technical and social aspects of agricultural production.

The thoroughness of control to which canal development in the Jamrao tract aspired distinguished south-eastern Sindh’s internal frontier from Upper Sindh’s external one. But one similarity was the logic of fixing people to particular locations. Indeed, turning nomadic hill people into settled plains cultivators had been the primary aim of Upper Sindh administrators from John Jacob to HNR Green. The difference was, again, the level of care that the administration showed in selecting land grantees whom they thought would both yield revenue and demonstrate loyalty to the regime. The remainder of this section of the article shows how

⁵⁰ David Gilmartin, ‘Water and Waste: Nature, productivity and colonialism in the Indus Basin’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 38:4 (November 29 – December 5, 2003): 5057-5065, pp.5061-5062.

⁵¹ Evan James, Commissioner-in-Sindh, to Secretary to Government of Bombay, RD, 08 October 1896. MSA, RD vol. 147 of 1897, compilation 1486.

Jamrao colonisation policy aimed to transform the internal frontier through a new social geography.

Jamrao tract colonisation policy was complex and detailed, and this article cannot describe it in full.⁵² But officials were determined to fix agricultural communities to agrarian lifestyles near the canal. In this they drew on precedents from the settlement of canal colonies in western Punjab, which had begun in 1885.⁵³ The first question in Jamrao colonisation was who ought to obtain land. In some senses, colonisation policy suggested that much of the Jamrao tract was not an exceptional space: the administration offered first refusal on the vast majority of new canal land, about 85 percent, to local landowners.⁵⁴ This helped to preserve the administration's relationship with its traditional collaborators in the region, something that routinely determined everyday relations between the colonial state and its more powerful subjects in Sindh and elsewhere.⁵⁵ The bulk of land allocation therefore coincided with the government's continued need for political stability.

But what the administration did with the remainder demonstrated changing priorities. The conquest of this frontier required settlers who were willing to commit to making a given plot of land productive. Most notably the settlers of Upper Sindh canal land, Baloch tribes, were now out of favour. Even before the Jamrao project began, Sindh's overlord government in Bombay had been pressing the provincial administration to replace ad hoc land distribution with a clear

⁵² For a detailed discussion, see Timothy Daniel Haines, 'Building the Empire, Building the Nation: Water, land, and the politics of river-development in Sind, 1898-1969' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of London, 2011), ch. 1, <[http://digirep.rhul.ac.uk/file/131eccc5-0dda-22dd-5f83-61deaccd07ac/8/T.D. Haines_Corrected_thesis_full_draft_FINAL.pdf](http://digirep.rhul.ac.uk/file/131eccc5-0dda-22dd-5f83-61deaccd07ac/8/T.D._Haines_Corrected_thesis_full_draft_FINAL.pdf)> [accessed 30 July 2014].

⁵³ See Gilmartin, 'Migration and Modernity'.

⁵⁴ David Cheesman, *Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness in Colonial Sind, 1865-1901* (London: Curzon Press, 1997), 76-77.

⁵⁵ See Sarah FD Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The pirs of Sindh, 1843-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

and systematic policy. Lord Sandhurst, the Governor of Bombay, recognised the importance of ‘reclaiming from predatory habits the wilder tribes by grants of land’, but insisted on public auction as the chief mechanism for allocation.⁵⁶ Baloch tribes, then, were no longer the main object of canal development. The requirements of British policy on the internal frontier in south-eastern Sindh, geared towards assimilating the Jamrao tract into a settled, closely administered agricultural order, contrasted sharply with the Upper Sindh concern with fixing tribesmen to particular places. In June 1898, for instance, Commissioner-in-Sindh James made clear that the administration would not use Jamrao land to reward service on the external frontier, even though political officers in Balochistan supported tribal leaders’ applications for land.⁵⁷ Balochis were ‘not good cultivators’, he wrote, and the administration instead wanted ‘good strong capable cultivators’ from Punjab.⁵⁸

With Baloch tribes no longer expected to pose a law-and-order threat to Sindh, the need to fix them to land in British India had disappeared. Instead the administration imported Punjabi peasants. Punjabi peasants were favoured figures in official imaginations, typically considered to be loyal, hard-working, and effective commercial farmers.⁵⁹ The financial success of the Punjab canal colonies rendered Punjabi peasants even more desirable to a Sindh administration determined to increase revenue receipts. Officials organised Punjabi settlement in the Jamrao tract according to their religion and place of origin. Whole villages were assigned to communities of cultivators hailing from specific districts in Punjab. By July 1901, two villages

⁵⁶ GoB RD Resolution 1419, 19 February 1897, pr.3. MSA, in collection of notes marked 3561B, GoB RD vol. 147 of 1897, compilation 1486.

⁵⁷ Evan James, Commissioner-in-Sindh, to Jamrao Canal Colonization Officer, 27 May 1899. GSA, GoB RD vol. 69A of 1899, vol. III, compilation 18.

⁵⁸ Evan James, Commissioner-in-Sindh, to Secretary to Government of Bombay RD, 08 October 1896. MSA, GoB RD vol. 147 of 1897, compilation 1486.

⁵⁹ Sarah Ansari, ‘Punjabis in Sind: Identity and Power’, *International Journal of Punjab Studies* 1.2 (1995), 6–8.

had been settled by Amritsar Sikhs and one by Jalandhar Sikhs; nine villages were of Punjabi Muslims.⁶⁰ Separating communities of cultivators by location meant creating pockets of land and society that colonial officials expected to be agriculturally productive while giving the administration little trouble. Officials involved in later canal colonisation schemes in Sindh, during the 1920s and 1930s, regarded the settlement of Punjabi peasants in the Jamrao tract as an economic and political success.⁶¹ Using Punjabi outsiders to promote colonial authority in the Jamrao tract attested to the continued importance of encouraging demographic change in Sindh's frontier policy.

Another aspect of Jamrao colonisation policy attempted to physically the social geography of apathy and resistance among some Sindhis. The transformed landscape of the Jamrao tract served as an arena for the integration of 'troublesome' groups into orderly communities, physically displaced from the regions where they had previously resisted the state's rule. Policy towards the internal frontier, like the earlier policy towards the external frontier, attempted to fix mobile state-resisters to a socially and spatially defined agrarian order. One example was the resettlement of the Hurs, a group of outlaws who proclaimed devotion to the Pir Pagaro, an influential hereditary saint. The Hurs had rebelled against British authority in south-eastern Sindh between 1894 and 1896.⁶² Apart from relocating them from their ancestral villages to the Jamrao tract, the Commissioner-in-Sindh proposed mixing the Hurs with loyalist military pensioners of Baloch, Pashto, and Punjabi extraction.⁶³

⁶⁰ L Robertson, Jamrao Canal Colonization Officer, 14 July 1901, to R Giles, Commissioner-in-Sindh, accompanying PWD Resolution AI-1138 of 1901, 31 May 1901. MSA, RD vol. 196 of 1901, compilation 1486.

⁶¹ Daniel Haines, *Building the Empire, Building the Nation: Development, legitimacy, and hydro-politics in Sind, 1919-1969* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 79-83.

⁶² Ansari, *Sufi Saints*, 57-76.

⁶³ Evan James, Commissioner-in-Sindh, to Lord Sandhurst, Governor of Bombay, 17 June 1896. BL, Dow Papers, MSS Eur E 372/1.

Another group, the Talpur Mirs, presented a different issue. As the descendants of the Talpurs who had ruled Sindh before Napier's conquest, the Mirs at the end of the nineteenth century received privileges and government pensions. They had been key British allies after the conquest, but by the 1890s the administration had found a broad enough base of collaborators that it did not need to maintain the special position of what Commissioner James called 'this troublesome and at present useless and discontented class'.⁶⁴ Other officers took a friendlier view of the Mirs, but still favoured using Jamrao land to encourage them to abandon their memories of glory and settle into farming.⁶⁵ While the administration did not ultimately compel the Mirs to disperse into the general populace and supervise day-to-day agricultural activities, it did manage to settle many of them in the tract.⁶⁶ By exercising its power to shuffle populations around imperial territory, the administration increased its control over people as well as over the 'wild' spaces under its jurisdiction.

The Jamrao Canal both marked the changing nature of Sindh, and contributed to the process of change. The land colonisation policy suggested that the colonial administration felt more secure in relation to threats originating just across the border in eastern Balochistan. Political stability within the tract itself and across Sindh, and not in the trans-border region to the north and west of the province, was the priority. For this reason, local landowners absorbed the bulk of the land. Plans to import Punjabi cultivators, as well as the control that the Public Works Department and Revenue Department attempted to maintain over irrigation and cultivation, spoke to a conception of Sindh as a region where the state could encourage farming and extract

⁶⁴ Memo by Evan James, Commissioner-in-Sindh, 14 November 1899. GSA, Political Department [PD] file 4 of 1902, compilation 4, p.72.

⁶⁵ Mohammad Yakub, Jamrao Canal Colonization Officer, to Commissioner-in-Sindh, 13 February 1902. GSA, PD file 4 of 1902, compilation 4, p.111.

⁶⁶ Grants to 49 Talpur Mirs were made by mid-March 1902. Mohammad Yakub, Jamrao Canal Colonization Officer, to R Giles, Commissioner-in-Sindh, 19 March 1902. GSA, PD file 4 of 1902, compilation 4, p.193.

revenue, rather than hope merely to suppress revolt. The ideology of productivity also fitted into the Jamrao scheme's assault on the province's dry south-east. Making the desert bloom, a repeated trope in later British and Pakistani rhetoric about irrigated agriculture in Sindh, had roots in the Jamrao project's transformation of the tract.⁶⁷ Both construction and colonization afforded the administration an opportunity to extend and intensify its control over people and the environment, so far as political expediency allowed. In this way, the Jamrao Canal pushed the government's authority into areas where the state had penetrated only poorly in the past. The internal frontier had replaced the external frontier as the main object of development, but that development was different. The Jamrao tract was closer than Upper Sindh to the railway networks and trade routes that made commercial agriculture possible. As an internal frontier, located well inside the empire's borders, the administration could also address the tract's environmental challenges to state authority without worrying about the destabilising effects of violent incursions from outside. Opening up this internal frontier meant applying technological and social fixes to the landscape in order to boost agricultural production and consolidate imperial authority.

5. CONCLUSION

The passage of time, and events outside the province, lessened the relevance of the Upper Sindh frontier as the practical stopping-point of British power. Although Sindh's location on the route to Afghanistan had helped lead to its annexation in 1843, British officers subsequently seemed, day to day, more preoccupied with the province's internal and external frontiers than with Great Game strategy. With the virtual pacification of Balochistan under Sandeman, Sindh's border trouble was much reduced. At the same time, the administration in Sindh pushed towards

⁶⁷ Daniel Haines, 'Concrete 'Progress': Irrigation, development and modernity in mid-twentieth century Sind', *Modern Asian Studies* 45:1 (January 2011): 179-200.

more regular and formalised control over space in the province as a whole. Political and infrastructural developments inside and outside the province had brought a more centralised style of governance and more systematic canal management. But the politics of external frontiers did not die out. Western Balochistan, and the Pashtun-dominated North-West Frontier, became the places where imperial power met exceptional circumstances.⁶⁸ Lord Curzon's trek across the Pamirs in 1894 demonstrated the continuing importance of British relationships with borderland tribes.⁶⁹ But Sindh frontier politics turned inwards, towards the spaces where colonial authority was hampered by a harsh environment and a lack of settled agriculturalists. Like the Upper Sindh frontier, the Jamrao tract constituted a particular area that demanded novel ways for the state to interact with, and assert control over, the population. Canal irrigation again appeared as an activity that engaged people with the land in particular ways, and made them easier to govern. This was certainly true of both the frontiers that this article has discussed, where canal-building was consistently expected to transform the local environment.

Comparing British policy on the internal and external frontiers reveals that colonial applications of irrigation technology and land tenure in each case was intended to produce significantly different geographies of state space. Whereas canal policy on the mid-nineteenth century Upper Sindh frontier aimed at securing the border, the Jamrao Canal turned the internal frontier into a space of opportunity to be exploited. Official discourse represented the external frontier as an interface between the cultivated plains, the domain of the colonial state, and the hills beyond it which they considered wild. Digging canals in Upper Sindh and encouraging Baloch tribes to settle them distracted potential raiders from committing violent acts against colonial subjects, and brought the limits of effective state control nearer to Sindh's provincial

⁶⁸ Marsden and Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*, 72.

⁶⁹ See Lord Curzon of Kedleston, *On the Indian Frontier*, ed. Dhara Anjaria (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

boundaries. At the same time, it physically removed Baloch tribesmen from their upland environment and incorporated them into an agrarian social order. Canal digging in Upper Sindh was meant to act on tribal people as much as on the plains landscape. Drawing the tribes into Sindh and settling them on canal land meant bringing them into colonial space. This helped to demarcate Upper Sindh as a part of empire's inside, in contrast with the hills that constituted its outside.

The idea of establishing a space in which Indian cultivators would act on their environment to make it agriculturally productive, which in turn would make the cultivators loyal state subjects, also underpinned colonial policy on the internal frontier in south-eastern Sindh. Here, however, the project was not intended to demarcate inner and outer spaces. Instead it sought to consolidate colonial control in the province by bringing more land under intensive revenue-producing agriculture. But the Jamrao project had equally important spatial and ideological implications. Beinart and Hughes have argued that the notion of a frontier suggests restless expansion; but, they continue, frontier policies across the British Empire tended to stabilise imperial spatiality.⁷⁰ Similarly, fully assimilating the Jamrao tract into a settled, administered agricultural order helped to produce a social geography of loyalty to the state. As Robbins has shown of later attempts in Rajasthan to divide 'social' from 'natural' spaces and enforce different kinds of land use in them, state control is the key to the production of 'modern' landscapes.⁷¹ Relying as it did on turning agricultural surpluses into revenue, rather than industry or commerce, the colonial state in India was rooted in plains agriculture. Irrigation extension via the Jamrao canal transformed a near-desert into the realm of state-sponsored modernity.

⁷⁰ Beinart and Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, 2.

⁷¹ Paul Robbins, 'Tracking Invasive Land Covers in India, or Why Our Landscapes Have Never Been Modern', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 637-659.

Where does this leave our understanding of frontiers more generally? This article has argued for continued investigation into the environmental basis of frontiers. However flawed the theory and practice, the idea of simultaneously remaking people and nature as a transformative process recalls Frederick Jackson Turner's near-contemporary thesis on the frontier of the American West. By comparing settler processes in the United States and South Africa, Beinart and Coates have highlighted the broad applicability of an environmental framework for understanding frontiers in different contexts. Bello and Perdue have shown that malarial mosquitoes and classical Chinese ideas about savagery and the natural environment helped regulate relations between the Qing state and its borderlands.⁷² Redclift has identified places in South America where the natural environment is transformed or plundered to meet human needs as commodity and settlement frontiers.⁷³ This article has demonstrated that the attention that these and other authors draw to transformations of nature is applicable, to a point, to imperial India.

But we have also seen that the British Indian state's engagement with two types of frontier in Sindh produced distinctive forms of frontier policy. This change occurred even within the relatively short time span of half a century, and in two cases of canal-digging in parts of the same province. Accordingly we must be cautious in our theoretical understanding of frontiers, and pay close attention to the specifics of local contexts as well as the many similarities between frontiers in a range of times and places. As Heesterman recognised, his own claim that the true frontiers of Mughal power were internal and not external does not translate readily to the British

⁷² William Beinart and Peter Coates, *Environment and History: The taming of nature in the USA and South Africa* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 9-13. Bello, 'To go where no Han could go for long'. Peter C Perdue, 'Nature and Nurture on Imperial China's Frontiers', in Richard M. Eaton, Munis D Faruqui, David Gilmartin, and Sunil Kumar (eds), *Expanding Frontiers in South Asian and World History: Essays in honour of John F Richards* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷³ Redclift, *Frontiers*, 33.

imperial period. The internal frontier was indeed an object of development in Sindh. But it took particular historical circumstances, and the state's increased technical and logistical ability, to turn officials' attention inwards from the external frontier. The example of the relationship between colonial officials and Baloch raiders in Upper Sindh partially supports Clark's recent assertion that a frontier is essentially 'a cultural division, a loosely defined zone that differentiates two distinct cultures that commonly view each other in terms of civilization'.⁷⁴ But if we understand frontiers more broadly as zones where difficult terrain and environmental conditions severely limit state control, as on the internal frontier of south-eastern Sindh, then the inside/outside binary does not apply. In the Jamrao Canal case, the relevant binary was wasteland/productive land. Lacking a distinction 'in terms of civilization' did not reduce the sense among colonial officials that transforming the internal frontier would produce a state space with the attributes of a truly civilised life: peaceable agriculture and permanent residence. This tracks much more closely to what Scott described as the civilization/barbarism binary in the worldviews of rice-growing valley states in Southeast Asia, which divided state and non-state space. But the sharp break in the intensity of development on the Jamrao tract, compared with canal-digging in Upper Sindh, demonstrates the variegated nature of state space itself. For all that frontier discourses, including those of the British in Sindh, have relied on binary distinctions between the civilised and the wild, frontiers are varied places. In Ludden's elegant generalisation, '[f]rontiers are places and time where empire strives to incorporate people into orderly peripheries'.⁷⁵ But a frontier's orientation – inwards or outwards – goes a long way towards determining what an orderly periphery actually looks like.

⁷⁴ Hugh R Clark, 'Frontier Discourse and China's Maritime Frontier: China's frontiers and the encounter with the sea through early imperial history', *Journal of World History* 20, no. 1 (2009): 1-33, 4.

⁷⁵ David Ludden, 'The Process of Empire: Frontiers and borderlands', in CA Bayly and Peter Fibiger Bang, *Tributary Empires in Global History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 147.